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BRIEFER ARTICLES.

Solanum triflorum Nutt.—Five years ago this plant was comparatively uncommon in Northern Montana. It might then be found here and there on the prairies or near water-courses, but now, during the past three years, it has been noticeably increasing, owing to the rapid influx of people who, instead of going into stock-raising or mining, have turned their attention to agricultural occupations. The plant grows better in cultivated ground, and it is a fact worth recording that it grows best of all in situations particularly suited to the development of S. tuberosum. In its finest condition the plant spreads over the ground in mats three feet or more across the branches, usually rooting all along the portions touching the earth, and bearing many pale blue to purplish flowers, similar in general appearance to those of S. tuberosum, but much smaller. Where the plant is found on the wild prairies it is often low but nearly erect, sending out short lateral ascending branches, which bear small, pale, often yellowish, less conspicuous flowers, and the subsequent berries are usually a little smaller and less numerous than in the field form.

One day during August, passing through a field of potatoes, the owner of which, who was with me, and evidently an intelligent man, pointing to a heavy musky-smelling mat of S. triflorum, asked the name of those "wild potatoes." I replied by asking why he called them wild potatoes. "Well," said he, "they are, aren't they? They bear flowers like a potato, and potato-bugs live upon the leaves." I had noted the latter fact several years before, but had never seen the larvæ very numerous upon the plants. This season, however, an enormous crop of potato-beetle larvæ has been produced, and chiefly upon S. triflorum. This species seemed, even where S. tuberosum was also present, to be mainly used as the preliminary or original host, from which many, but by no means all, of the larvæ, after attaining a certain size, would crawl to plants of the other species.—F. W. Anderson, *Great Falls, Montana.*

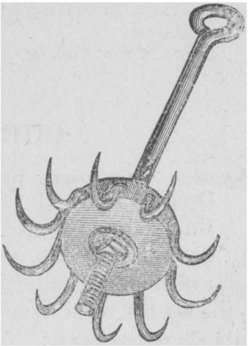
Coptis, section Chrysocoptis.—Any one collecting in Idaho (say on the Pend d'Oreille river, or on the Lolo trail above Clear Water) in the spring should look out for Coptis occidentalis, the flowers of which are a desideratum. In Wyeth's four specimens they are undeveloped, and little can be made of Nuttall's figure in this respect. Geyer's specimens were going out of flower; but I have found withered remains of a sepal and a petal. When good flowers are obtained the three following species will propably be confirmed:

C. Occidentalis Torr. and Gray. Leaves simply trifoliolate: leaflets long-petiolulate (2 or 3 inches long at maturity, with terminal petiolule 1–1½ inches long, and lateral ones hardly half shorter), of roundish outline, 3-lobed to middle; the lobes obtuse, slightly 3-cleft or incised, and obtusely dentate: petals shorter than sepals, subulate from a subsessile hardly nectariferous base: mature carpels longer than stipe: seeds oblong.

C. LACINIATA Leaves trifoliolate: lateral leaflets comparatively short petiolulate; all ovate in outline, nearly 3-parted, with divisions 3-7-cleft or incised and dentate, mostly acute: sepals linear-attenuate, and filiform-attenuate petals nearly of the next species: mature carpels longer than stipe: seeds oval.—*C. asplenifolia* Gray, Proc. Am. Acad., viii. 375, and Watson, Bot. Calif, ii. 427. This we have only from Oregon and Northwest California, collected by E. Hall, Cusick, Henderson, G. R. Vasey, Rattan. Only Cusick has sent it in blossom.

C. ASPLENIFOLIA Salisb. Leaves pinnately 5-foliolate; with leaflets all slender-petiolulate, ovate-oblong in outline, and pinnately divided or parted, lower divisions short petiolulate and upper confluent: sepals and petals filiform-attenuate, nearly equal; the latter with thickened concave nectary between middle and base: mature carpels shorter than the stipe. We have this only from British Columbia and Alaska.—ASA GRAY.

Dredge for Chara.—Last year, in giving directions for the collection of Characeæ, I recommended a modification of a dredge used by Prof. Nordstedt, of Sweden. I am constrained to say that a dredge more like his original one is better for deep water, and that the one here illustrated answers perfectly every purpose, provided one carries, as I now do, a small rake for shallower water. This dredge consists of a disk of lead about three inches in diameter and three-fourths of an inch thick, in the edge of which are imbedded about ten hooks. I have had them bent backward in order to furnish a kind of "shoulder" to give greater strength in case of catching in an obstruction. These will firmly hold a boat, or raise a couple of hundred pounds from the bottom. Through the center of this disk is passed, vertically, an iron rod about a foot long, which has a ring in the upper end, for a line, and which is allowed to project about three inches below the disk. It takes apart readily by means of a nut and screw on the rod, and packs in a small box. It weighs about two and a half pounds, and is made by Flynn & Doyle, Bantam, Conn., at a cost of four dollars.—T. F. ALLEN.



OPEN LETTERS.

Vitality of seeds.

In making the excavation for the new building of Franklin College last fall, the dirt was hauled upon the campus, and in a short time it was noticed where the soil was placed a great many specimens of poke-weed (Phytolacca decandra) were growing. The north building was erected in